

Bobcats, Eppley ready to open 2011-12 season

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The Lees-McRae College men's basketball team opens the 2011-2012 season with high hopes, welcoming a talented and experienced recruiting class to augment a strong returning core. Head coach Scott Polsgrove enters his sixth season at the helm, looking to mirror the Bobcats' strong start last year.

With the return of eight letter-winners,

a core of veteran leaders, and a gifted recruiting class, the Bobcats are poised to make a significant leap into the top tier in Conference Carolinas.

"We're very excited about this group and their potential," said coach Polsgrove. "They've been working very hard since they got on campus, our new guys have meshed very well with our veteran players, and I think our team unity is the best it's ever been."

Among the new faces joining the program will be a familiar one. Chad Eppley (Boone, N.C.) joins the Bobcats from Caldwell Community College after a successful prep career at Watauga High School, where he averaged 15.7 points and 4.1 assists per game en route to a NW4A all-Conference selection. "[Chad] Eppley is a very skilled player who will provide minutes at multiple positions," said Polsgrove. Eppley had a brief stay with the University of San Francisco of the West Coast Conference last season, but he did not suit up for the Dons.

The Bobcats feature seven returners this season, including junior guard Daniel Sepokas (Illawong, Australia), who averaged 13.2 points and 3.6 assists per game last year. "[Daniel] Sepokas is our main returning scoring weapon and distributor, and we are expecting big things from him this year," said Polsgrove. "As a junior, he knows he will be a marked man, and we have no doubt he can rise to the challenge."

Junior Jeremiah Henry (Semmes, Ala.) returns to anchor the Bobcats' inside game at both ends of the floor, after putting together a solid season in limited action last year. "[Jeremiah] Henry has come back with an improved post game, and we will look to him to anchor our offensive and defensive game in the paint," said Polsgrove.

DeAndre Tillman (Charlotte, N.C.) returns for his sophomore season after a strong rookie campaign in which he averaged 3.2 points and 3.1 rebounds per game in limited minutes. "[DeAndre] Tillman gives us length and athleticism at the four," said Polsgrove. "While he played somewhat of a reserve role last season, he will be asked to provide both points and rebounding this year."

Will Lopez (Sydney, Australia) is back for his sophomore campaign after playing a limited role last season, knocking down 50 percent of his attempts from the floor, including a .333 clip from outside the arc. "[Will] Lopez's role will greatly expand this year," said Polsgrove. "He will have an impact at both forward positions for us this season."

Juan Urbina (Barquisimeto, Venezuela) is expected to fill a critical reserve role this season after playing limited minutes last year. "[Juan] Urbina will be contributing minutes at both the four and five positions for us this season," said Polsgrove.

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Corey Young (Bluff City, Tenn.) returns for his junior season after a sophomore campaign in which he dished out 32 assists and posted a 38.5 percent clip from the floor in limited action off the bench. "[Corey] Young will be contributing valuable minutes at the point this season," said Polsgrove. "He is a very intelligent player who has the capability of hitting open jump shots, and has great leadership skills."

James Saint Marc (Tampa, Fla.) is back for his sophomore season after redshirting last year. "[James] Saint Marc will be playing minutes at the five," said Polsgrove. "We hope to utilize his strength and athleticism in the paint."

The Bobcats also welcome six promising newcomers into the fold this season, including junior transfer DJ Brown (Anderson, S.C.), who joins LMC from Spartanburg Methodist College. "[DJ] Brown comes to us after a great junior college career," said Polsgrove. "He will be an invaluable scorer for us, mostly from outside, and will provide great leadership at both ends of the floor."

Gideon Oji (Imane in Kogi, Nigeria) comes to Lees-McRae from Franklin Academy in Wake Forest, N.C., where he averaged a double-double with 16.1 points and 11.5 rebounds per game. "[Gideon] Oji brings size, athleticism, and great potential to the post," said Polsgrove.

"He will be counted on this year to bring defense, shot blocking and rebounding in the paint."

BJ Battle (Orlando, Fla.) joins the Bobcats from Timber Creek High School in Orlando, Fla., where he garnered Orlando all-Metro Conference First team recognition, averaging 15.6 points and 8.8 rebounds per game. "[BJ] Battle is a very skilled athlete who will play the wing," said Polsgrove. "We expect him to be a very exciting player to watch."

Asad Lamot (Mebane, N.C.) comes to Lees-McRae from Oak Ridge Military Academy in Oak Ridge, N.C., where he captained the team for three years and led it to a 33-6 record last season. "[Asad] Lamot is a very promising point guard and a quality leader who understands the game very well," said Polsgrove. "He will play very valuable minutes for us this year."

"Our non-conference schedule is very demanding, with some high-profile division I schools along with some of the top programs in the division II ranks," said Polsgrove. "Our conference will be very tough once again, with both Queens [University of Charlotte] and Limestone [College] picked to share the title."

"I really believe this group has what it takes to help us do some things that have never been accomplished since Lees-McRae made the transition to a four-year school," said Polsgrove. Lees-McRae opens its season with an exhibition matchup at University of North Carolina at Asheville on Monday night at 8 p.m. in Asheville, N.C. The Bobcats open their regular season slate on Friday when they travel to Boone, N.C. to take on NCAA Division I Appalachian State University.

Photo Courtesy: Chad Eppley, LMC Athletics